Clean eating

It sounds so refreshing.
But what does it really mean?

Simply put, eating clean means consuming mostly whole or "real" foods that are unprocessed or minimally processed, and steering clear of foods with added sugar, preservatives, fats and chemicals.

As a rule of thumb, the closer a food is to its natural form, the cleaner it is. So what does a clean diet look like? Read more to find which foods do and don't belong in your grocery basket and review a checklist for maintaining a clean eating lifestyle.

Tips for sticking to a clean routine

Dedicate time to meal-planning, grocery shopping and lunch/snack prep.

Read labels and don't buy food with ingredients you can't pronounce.

Eat smaller meals more frequently to minimize dips in blood sugar that can leave you scrambling for a sugary pick-me-up.

Don't restrict calories. Clean eating is about making balanced, healthy choices, and eating protein and carbs in moderation.

Avoid alcohol, or drink in moderation. And steer clear of sugary cocktails.

Experiment with natural sweeteners and flour substitutes, such as almond or coconut flour.

Silence self-criticism. If you do succumb to the temptation of an "unclean" meal or treat, don't beat yourself up. The sum of all your food choices is what matters.

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Load up your cart with:

Buy organic when you can, especially when it comes to the pesticide-laden "dirty dozen."

Popular choices like brown rice, whole wheat, whole oats, quinoa and buckwheat deliver fiber, protein, vitamins and minerals.

Plain yogurt, milk, cheese and unsweetened, non-dairy milks are good sources of protein and calcium.

Choose unflavored varieties and plain nut butters with no added sugars.

Add lemon, lime, mint, cucumber or muddled berries to tap or sparkling water for a flavor boost.

Fresh fruits and vegetables

Meat, poultry and fish

Whole grains

Beans

Dairy

Eggs

Nuts

"Good" fats

Water

For a healthy dose of protein and iron, stick with lean, unsmoked, heart-healthy cuts.

Beans are a budget-friendly source of protein and fiber.

A little egg packs a big punch full of protein, selenium, vitamins D, B6 and B12, and minerals such as zinc, iron and copper.

Healthy, unsaturated fats like olive oil and avocado are good for your heart and brain.

Leave out:

Processed foods
Refined foods
Sweeteners

Added sugars
Artificial ingredients
Preservatives

Alcohol
Soda
Fruit juice